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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Man, it's been one of those weeks! I don't even know when this week's issue will be "hitting the streets" because, as I'm writing this, I have no DSL service. Which means, no access to the web to do my research, put the issue together, and get it online and out to you. A Verizon service technician just left the house to check out the DSL "home operations" lines because everything on our end appears to be working fine. So here I sit waiting to find out what's happening!

The week started off pretty well! My wife and I celebrated our 23rd anniversary last weekend. We went to Maine and took my father out for his 87th birthday; and we celebrated our anniversary as well. It was good seeing my father again.

But, as the week progressed, things went progressively downhill. Family issues, work issues, internet problems - even golf issues! I played two rounds of golf this week - Thursday and Friday. Thursday wasn't too bad, and I can't complain too much. Today (Friday), I should have stayed in bed and never gone to the course! I played very poorly, but not as poorly as one of the guys I was with. On a few holes near the end of our round, this guy was getting so aggravated with himself, that he started taking it out on his clubs. Some of his clubs went flying on occasion! I felt a little bad because I know he's a better golfer than he displayed today. But, there's no sense to flinging clubs!

And now the day is nearing its end and I'm still waiting to see whether or not we'll have service. And, it's the beginning of the long Labor Day weekend - we're all supposed to be relaxing and enjoying the last unofficial weekend of the summer. Where did it go...?

So, who knows when you'll be reading this week's issue, but I hope that it is not delayed for too long. As I'm writing, the bulk of the issue has been completed. Still some more articles to finish researching and compiling, get Joe's column from the web, convert it to html format, and mail/upload to all of you! Fun stuff! Enjoy your weekend, and stay safe!

Until next time...

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Taskbar 4 Beta Release

Hi!

I've done a lot of work on Taskbar lately, mostly because I switched from N.AES to XaAES last year and had to fix Taskbar accordingly. Now large parts of the code has been completely rewritten, and many bugs eliminated. There was a particularly nasty bug that would cause a bus error under certain circumstances, so hopefully the problems many has had with poor stability should be gone now.

The new beta is available at http://atari.nvg.org/Taskbar/. Please read the documentation carefully before installing, and report any bugs to me. Thanks.

--

```
/*
** Jo Even Skarstein   http://atari.nvg.org/
*/
```

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. It's going to be a very short column this week because, once I weeded out the deletion notices, the troll posts, and the just plain stupid annoying UseNet jetsam and flotsam, there really wasn't a lot of 'meat' left.

But I wanted to submit at least something to you for another reason all together. I know that some of you are going to cringe, but I've just got to mention a couple of political topics. I give you permission to skip on down to the UseNet posts if you'd like. <G>

First, this thing with Senator Larry Craig of Idaho. For anyone living in a cave or on some deserted island, Senator Craig was arrested in an airport restroom for allegedly soliciting... well, let's say "friendly contact".

Now, besides the fact that I find it cosmically funny that one of the senate's leading "just say no to ho-mo" members was tagged for this (AND that there were rumblings of this self-same senator's behavior during the 1980's 'Senate Page Scandal') I find it a bit disturbing that one of the two major political parties finds it more 'proper' to quickly and without question sever ties to this senator, who has been pretty much a cornerstone of their 'family values' platform for two decades. At the time of this writing, the senator has not resigned, but we're hearing more and more anonymous (you know, those jokers inside the party who are so sure of themselves that they'll only speak on condition of anonymity) reports that he's going to resign "any time

now".

It is true that the senator plead guilty to a lesser charge, and that signals to some that his years of service and usefulness to his party are done, but in my eyes, a plea holds much less of a stigma than a conviction would have.

I'll be quite honest with you, folks. I don't particularly care what the good senator's sexual orientation might be. It's just not a factor to me. Of course, _I_ am not one of the ones who've made a career out of telling everyone else what they should think, how they should feel and, above all, that they need to be afraid of anyone who's different.

I've always thought that our differences were what made us strong. It's the fact that we're a 'melting pot' that makes us what we are. I've always taken the view that it's better to know about different ideas than to not know. I firmly believe that fear is counter-productive. And, since fear is usually brought about by the unknown, you can do away with a large amount of fear by KNOWING what's going on.

Of course, there are those who broker power on the basis of fear. Fear, while counter-productive to those feeling it, is a wonderful mode of control to those who live and die by the ballot.

So, while this particular political party dresses up intolerance as moral superiority, they also display the fact that they themselves are afraid. Afraid of association, afraid of losing their precarious grasp on power, afraid of being seen for what they actually are: scared, angry, oppressed individuals who just want to feel powerful by browbeating everyone else into conforming to a vision of what they themselves wish they were.

I'm not going to tell you not to belong to one party or the other. Well, I'd prefer it if you belonged to the same one that I do, but it's not a precondition to being able to get things done. That's the difference between me and them. They're deathly afraid that if you find out that it's okay to be different, you might not be afraid of 'different' anymore and they'd have a much harder time getting you to let them do whatever they want in the first place.

Now, on the other subject... also political... President Bush just announced his plan for helping people who are in danger of losing their home because they cannot pay their mortgage.

As you probably know, lots of people thought they'd found a new 'loophole' in the mortgage business, and took out sub-prime variable-rate mortgages in order to be able to afford a home.

My wife and I just bought our first home, and we too had to take out a mortgage to do it. Hell, A-ONE doesn't pay THAT well. <g>

But we never ever considered a sub-prime loan because of that old adage, "If something seems too good to be true...".

Now people are finding out that their monthly payment is beyond their ability to pay it.

What the president is proposing is tax relief for both borrower and lender under specific circumstances. While I'm sure that everyone

involved will appreciate saving a couple of percent on their annual tax debt, it galls me that we now need to help prop up an industry that is in the predicament it is mainly because of its own greed. Had the lending industry not felt the need to 'hedge' with variable rate mortgages, there would be fewer defaulted loans now, which would result in a more relaxed atmosphere for lending in general, which would allow borrowers attain mortgages that were more stable and manageable for them, which would help to stabilize the housing market.

I can, to a certain extent, pardon borrowers who were so desperate to own a home that they took a chance on a variable rate mortgage, but they too were often motivated by greed. Variable rate mortgages were going like hotcakes even when fixed-rate mortgages were at their lowest rates in decades. That tells me that either people were trying to wring that last little bit out of the system, or they were over-reaching for a home, and counting on the "secret" they'd found to give them some extra purchase-power.

Well, as with all "secrets" and "systems", there's a catch. The catch this time is that you've got to be ready to get out from under the skyrocketing interest rates when things go in the other direction.

That's the part that most people forgot this time... that a pendulum always swings back. Lower-than-low rates aren't going to stay that way forever, they're going to swing back in the other direction. Oops.

As I said, it's one thing to help out legions of homeowners who didn't know any better. But it ticks me off to have to help out the industry that made a killing on the practice that's now depressing the housing industry. It's like rewarding them for sticking it to people in the first place. Institutional welfare is what it is. Well, as long as the money's going to help those who really need it, right?

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

'Jao' trolls (but not in a bad way) around for Falcon stuff:

"[I'm] Looking for a few bits to repair my Falcon including
a floppy drive (original if possible), a PSU as the current one is a bit
messed up and a keyboard. If anyone has any Falcon bits for sale/trade
let me know."

'ggnkua' tells Jao:

"Well if you don't find an original floppy, you can always use a new one by placing the "drive select" switch to 0.

Also, regarding the PSU, if all else fails then you can use an external AT (or something like the picoPSU with an external 20V brick).

Finally, I _think_ that a plain ST/STE keyboard will work with the Falcon."

Mark Bedingfield adds:

"All correct. I fixed a Falcon by just replacing the keycaps on a ST keyboard. also if you find an old HP in the scrap yard, some have nice Atari grey Sony floppy drives. Anyone who knows electronics should be able to fix the PSU."

Last week, Hallvard Tangaraas said:

"For some strange reason, the Atari ST emulator Hatari (http://hatari.sourceforge.net/) no longer works on my G4 Mac. It's worked perfectly in the past although I don't use it very often. Come to think of it... I've probably installed an upgrade to MacOS since I last used it, and now run MacOS 10.4.10. I also noticed that there was a newer version available at the Hatari website; version 0.95, but even after upgrading it to that version it still won't work (it brings up a blank, black screen and crashes after a few seconds). I've tried trashing its preference file, but that doesn't make any difference."

Coda tells Hallvard:

"I'm on 10.4.10 on a G4 and Hatari 0.9 works fine here."

Francois Le Coat adds:

"Hatari 0.95 works here on my dual-G4@1.25GHz with an up-to-date MacOSX.3.9, pretty well."

Hallvard scratches his head a bit and posts:

"Something strange is going on because I just tried it on another user-account on my Mac, and it works fine there, but on my main user-account it doesn't.

I've tried reinstalling both Hatari and the SDL framework which it uses, as well as deleting the preference files. Any ideas?"

Coda tells Hallvard:

"If it works on another account but not yours, then the problem is local to your user account (obviously), so if I was you I would look for the .hatari.cfg and .hatari.nvram files in your home directory, and delete them. Pull up terminal, do a 'ls -la' to check they are there, and then 'rm -f .hatari.*' to get rid of them (without the single quotes)."

Hallvard replies to Coda:

"Yes, I deleted the ".hatari.cfg" file using the terminal when trying to work it out, but that didn't help either (I didn't know about the .hatari.nvram" file). Now I have neither (probably not created by Hatari again since it doesn't work properly).
I've also used Onyx (http://www.titanium.free.fr/pgs/english.html) to

clean up my system, but again to no avail. Perhaps I've seriously messed up MacOS somehow..."

Ian McCall jumps in and asks Hallvard:

"Any logs in Console that might help? Also, and I usually hesitate to recommend this because it's acquired a mythical value that it doesn't merit, have you tried to repairing permissions using Disk Utility? If it's working in one account but not another, then it might actually -be- disk permissions for a change."

Hallvard does some checking and reports back to Ian:

"I think that was it as it's working again now!
I also un-installed a few "haxies" (OS enhancement hacks), but it can't have been that because it worked in the other user-account.
In any case I can continue to use Hatari.
Thanks!"

Now it's Ian's turn to ask a question about creating disk images:

"I've downloaded Llamatron from the llamasoft site, but it's a .zip file which expands to the raw .prg files etc.. What I need is a disk image that I can use either with Hatari or NoSTalgia.

Are there any utilities for turning a folder into a disk image at all? Would prefer OS X utils, but platform doesn't really matter too much as I have VMware images of Windows and Linux (Ubuntu) too."

Coda tells Ian:

"When I need to do this, I just use the virtual hard disk (directory structure) with Hatari, and just dump the files I want into that folder in OSX. Then I load Hatari, insert a blank disk (image), and drag the files to the floppy disk. Job done."

Ian tells Coda:

"Worked a treat - thanks for the help!"

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - "Manhunt 2" Approved For Sale!

"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Metroid Prime 3: Corruption!
"Casual" Software, Inviting!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

"Manhunt 2" Game Approved For Sale

"Manhunt 2," a brutally violent video game that was effectively banned in the United States, has risen from the grave in a modified form and will go on sale for Halloween, its publisher said.

Take-Two Interactive Software Inc said a new version of the game, which features an insane asylum escapee killing enemies in gruesome ways, had won a "Mature" rating from the U.S. Entertainment Software Ratings Board, meaning it is meant for players aged 17 and over.

The ratings board had previously slapped an "Adults Only" rating on the game. While its decisions carry no legal weight, Microsoft Corp, Sony Corp and Nintendo Co Ltd do not allow such titles on their game consoles.

It was the second bit of recent good news for Take-Two after the strong debut of its spooky underwater shooting game "BioShock," and the company's shares rose as much as 3.3 percent on Friday, when it announced the "Manhunt 2" news.

"Manhunt 2 is important to us, and we're glad it can finally be appreciated as a gaming experience," said Sam Houser, founder of Rockstar Games, the development team within Take-Two that created "Manhunt" and is behind other popular but controversial titles like "Grand Theft Auto" and "Bully."

"Manhunt 2 is a powerful piece of interactive story telling that is a unique video game experience. We think horror fans will love it," Houser said in a statement.

Censors in Britain and Ireland have also banned the game from being sold, but Take-Two did not say whether it had submitted the reworked game for review in those countries.

The restrictions on "Manhunt 2" sparked a debate in the video game industry about whether the rating system needed an overhaul. Several game critics who played review versions of the game said it was similar to extremely violent but popular horror movies such as "Saw."

The game will be released on Sony's PlayStation 2 console and PSP handheld device as well as Nintendo's Wii.

Nintendo’s Epic Trilogy Concludes With Metroid Prime 3: Corruption

Monday’s launch of Metroid Prime 3: Corruption for Wii marks the end of a trilogy - and the start of the most active and dynamic Metroid adventure yet. With the motion-sensitive Wii Remote, you become one with heroine Samus Aran’s powerful arm cannon, while the Nunchuk can literally yank armor off enemies.

"Metroid Prime 3 has a revolutionary control style that makes it easy for anyone to immediately jump into the action," says George Harrison, Nintendo of America’s senior vice president of marketing and corporate communications. "Now, an entirely new audience can experience this amazing first-person adventure."

The rich story requires players to use their heads as much as their hands. Complex puzzles, tough enemies and new challenges put players inside the visor of the story’s heroine. As deadly Phazon threatens to corrupt Samus, she harnesses its power and attacks her enemies with superpowered weapons. Metroid Prime 3: Corruption features voice acting, new bounty hunters and three adjustable control settings for players of all skill levels.

Metroid Prime 3: Corruption, rated T for Teen, launched Monday exclusively for Wii. The game’s launch represents the culmination of Nintendo’s "Month of Metroid," which has featured free Metroid Prime 3: Corruption videos available for download in the Wii Shop Channel and the release of the classic Metroid and Super Metroid for the Virtual Console. For more information about Metroid Prime 3: Corruption, visit http://www.Metroid.com.

Vid-Games: Players Young And Old Invited

Nintendo’s impressive comeback over the last couple of years has been driven largely by "casual" software - the sort of games anyone of any age can quickly learn to play. Titles like "Nintendogs," "Brain Age" and "Clubhouse Games" have propelled sales of Nintendo’s portable DS, making it the most popular of the current generation of consoles.

The company has a brand name for its casual line: Touch Generations, which somewhat awkwardly connects the DS’ touch-screen capability to its cross-generational appeal. For now, Nintendo has reserved the Touch Generations logo for the software it publishes, but I can think of a few dozen more DS titles - like Ubisoft’s "Platinum Sudoku," Majesco’s "The New York Times Crosswords" and D3’s "Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords" - that older players would enjoy.

While I’m a more stereotypical video-game consumer, I like to balance intense action games with more laid-back fare. Even hardcore gamers need a break from "Gears of War" every now and then.

* "Brain Age 2" (Nintendo, for the DS, $19.99): Last year’s "Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!" was more than a surprise hit - it created a new genre, spawning a flood of imitators. Most of those lacked the simple charm of "Brain Age," but now Nintendo is back with a proper sequel.

Again, "Brain Age 2" presents you with an assortment of simple math and

observation puzzles. You may be asked to make correct change, unscramble words or complete an equation with the appropriate mathematical symbol. Speed and accuracy determine your "brain age" - the younger the better.

A few of the exercises, like a brief piano-playing challenge, are entertaining, and "Brain Age 2" also offers 100 sudoku puzzles. But the math questions are too straightforward to be much fun, and I still don't know if the "Brain Age" brand of rapid-fire problem-solving boosts your intelligence any more than crosswords, jigsaw puzzles or even "Pokemon." Still, trying to bring down your brain age can become an addiction. Two-and-a-half stars.

* "Picross DS" (Nintendo, for the DS, $19.99): Now that sudoku has conquered the world, some of its fans are discovering other Japanese logic puzzles with exotic names like kakuro, nurikabe and hanjie. The last of those is the basis of "Picross DS," a collection of hundreds of "paint-by-numbers" brainteasers.

Each puzzle begins as a blank grid. Numbers along the top show how many black squares are needed in each column; numbers along the left side provide the same information for the rows. You need to use logic to figure out which squares need to be filled in; get it right and you're rewarded with a pixelated picture. That little bonus makes "Picross" a little more rewarding than sudoku.

If you've never tried hanjie before, "Picross" provides a nice tutorial. Once you get the hang of it, there's enough material here to keep you busy for months. And "Picross" lets you make your own puzzles and send them to other players. It's a real bargain at just $20. Three-and-a-half stars.

* "TouchMaster" (Midway, for the DS, $29.99): If you're reading this in a bar, look around and you'll probably see one of Midway's TouchMaster machines - it's that countertop console that you can play trivia, solitaire or checkers on. If you aren't in a bar, well, now you can play 23 of those TouchMaster games on your DS.

It's a decent assortment. Besides trivia and card games, you get variations on mahjong, hangman, Yahtzee and others. There are a few duds in the bunch - "Hot Hoops" free-throw shooting, the incomprehensible "Artifact" - but most of the games are fun for a few minutes at a time.

As you would expect from games that are designed to appeal to a tipsy crowd, there's nothing terribly complicated here. On the whole, the games in "TouchMaster" are fast-paced and agreeable - and may bring back memories for those whose drinking days are behind them. Two-and-a-half stars.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Critics Urge Rejection of Microsoft "Open" Format

A Microsoft document format that may be adopted as an international standard this weekend is a ploy to lock in customers, who could lose control over their own data in a worst-case scenario, critics say.

The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) is balloting its members on the issue in a vote that closes on Sunday. ISO approval would encourage wider adoption of the Microsoft Open XML format by public-sector organizations.

Opponents of Open XML, which is the default file-saving format in Microsoft Office 2007, say there is no need for a rival standard to the widely used Open Document Format (ODF) that is already an international standard.

They argue its 6,000 pages of code, compared with ODF’s 860 pages, make it artificially complicated and untranslatable.

Microsoft and others point out that multiple standards are normal in the software and other industries and that competition makes for better products. Microsoft says its format has higher specifications and is more useful than ODF.

"More parallel standards makes for better standards. It’s good not to decide for a single standard too soon," Michael Groezinger, Microsoft’s chief technology officer in Germany, told Reuters in an interview.

He declined to speculate on the outcome of the ISO vote but welcomed last week’s decision of the German Institute for Standardisation - an ISO member - to give Open XML a conditional "yes" vote.

At the heart of the controversy are fears that Open XML is not as open as it claims to be, raising the specter that customers using the word-processing format could become reliant on Microsoft for access to their own documents. XML, short for Extensible Markup Language, is a standard for describing data in a way that is supposed to allow it to be shared across various systems and applications.

"The absolute nightmare scenario is that Microsoft says: ’Update your licenses or we’ll turn off your access,"’ Georg Greve, president of the Free Software Foundation Europe, told Reuters in an interview.

"Access to governmental data will completely depend on the existence of Microsoft," said Greve, who expects Microsoft to lose the ISO ballot in a close vote.

The Free Software Foundation is a U.S.-based non-profit organisation that campaigns for computer programs that can be freely used, modified and redistributed.

Microsoft’s Groezinger denies any danger of bodies losing access to their own data. He said Microsoft had handed over control of Open XML to standards-making body Ecma, which would make it available even in the event of Microsoft’s demise.

Microsoft has also given guarantees not to pursue any patent claims against parties using, selling or distributing Open XML, although some have questioned whether those guarantees are sufficiently binding or comprehensive.

It has also collaborated with Novell to develop a tool to translate Open XML documents into ODF and vice versa. But critics say the tool cannot provide a complete translation due to the higher complexity of the Microsoft format.

Open XML is unnecessarily bloated, partly because it packs in unrelated features that lead users to other Microsoft applications, FSF's Greve says.

"This is a classic vendor lock-in strategy," he told Reuters. "It's not that new, it's not that ingenious but it's quite effective."

Given Microsoft's leading market position, Open XML will become a de facto standard regardless of the ISO decision.

"The two standards may converge in the longer term, but all organizations should plan on them coexisting for at least the medium term," research group Gartner said in a recent report.

"The problems associated with the need to translate between formats will continue and will diminish the value of XML."

Prank Starts 25 Years of Security Woes

What began as a ninth-grade prank, a way to trick already-suspicious friends who had fallen for his earlier practical jokes, has earned Rich Skrenta notoriety as the first person ever to let loose a personal computer virus.

Although over the next 25 years, Skrenta started the online news business Topix, helped launch a collaborative Web directory now owned by Time Warner Inc.'s Netscape and wrote countless other computer programs, he is still remembered most for unleashing the "Elk Cloner" virus on the world.

"It was some dumb little practical joke," Skrenta, now 40, said in an interview. "I guess if you had to pick between being known for this and not being known for anything, I'd rather be known for this. But it's an odd placeholder for (all that) I've done."

"Elk Cloner" - self-replicating like all other viruses - bears little resemblance to the malicious programs of today. Yet in retrospect, it was a harbinger of all the security headaches that would only grow as more people got computers - and connected them with one another over the Internet.

Skrenta's friends were already distrusting him because, in swapping computer games and other software as part of piracy circles common at the time, Skrenta often altered the floppy disks he gave out to launch taunting on-screen messages. Many friends simply started refusing disks from him.

So during a winter break from the Mt. Lebanon Senior High School near Pittsburgh, Skrenta hacked away on his Apple II computer - the dominant personal computer then - and figured out how to get the code to launch those messages onto disks automatically.

He developed what is now known as a "boot sector" virus. When it boots, or starts up, an infected disk places a copy of the virus in the computer’s memory. Whenever someone inserts a clean disk into the machine and types the command "catalog" for a list of files, a copy gets written onto that disk as well. The newly infected disk is passed on to other people, other machines and other locations.

The prank, though annoying to victims, is relatively harmless compared with the viruses of today. Every 50th time someone booted an infected disk, a poem he wrote would appear, saying in part, "It will get on all your disks; it will infiltrate your chips."

Skrenta started circulating the virus in early 1982 among friends at his school and at a local computer club. Years later, he would continue to hear stories of other victims, including a sailor during the first Gulf War nearly a decade later (Why that sailor was still using an Apple II, Skrenta does not know).

These days, there are hundreds of thousands of viruses - perhaps more than a million depending on how one counts slight variations.

The first virus to hit computers running Microsoft Corp.’s operating system came in 1986, when two brothers in Pakistan wrote a boot sector program now dubbed "Brain" - purportedly to punish people who spread pirated software. Although the virus didn’t cause serious damage, it displayed the phone number of the brothers’ computer shop for repairs.

With the growth of the Internet came a new way to spread viruses: e-mail.

"Melissa" (1999), "Love Bug" (2000) and "SoBig" (2003) were among a slew of fast-moving threats that snarled millions of computers worldwide by tricking people into clicking on e-mail attachments and launching a program that automatically sent copies to other victims.

Although some of the early viruses overwhelmed networks, later ones corrupted documents or had other destructive properties.

Compared with the early threats, "the underlying technology is very similar (but) the things viruses can do once they get hold of the computer has changed dramatically," said Richard Ford, a computer science professor at the Florida Institute of Technology.

Later viruses spread through instant-messaging and file-sharing software, while others circulated faster than ever by exploiting flaws in Windows networking functions.

More recently, viruses have been created to steal personal data such as passwords or to create relay stations for making junk e-mail more difficult to trace.

Suddenly, though, viruses weren’t spreading as quickly. Virus writers now motivated by profit rather than notoriety are trying to stay low-key, lest their creations get detected and removed, along with their mechanism for income.

Many of the recent malicious programs technically aren’t even viruses, because they don’t self-replicate, but users can easily get infected by visiting a rogue Web site that takes advantage of any number of security vulnerabilities in computer software.

Although worldwide outbreaks aren't as common these days, "believe it or not there's exponentially more malware today than there ever was," said Dave Marcus, a research manager for McAfee Inc.'s Avert Labs. "We find 150 to 175 new pieces of malware every single day. Five years ago, it would have been maybe 100 new pieces a week."

Symantec Corp. formed the same year Skrenta unleashed "Elk Cloner," but it dabbled in non-security software before releasing an anti-virus product for Apple's Macintosh in 1989. Today, security-related hardware, software and services represent a $38 billion industry worldwide, a figure IDC projects will reach $67 billion in 2010.

Even as corporations and Internet service providers step up their defenses, though, virus writers look to emerging platforms, including mobile devices and Web-based services like social-networking sites.

"Malware writers can't assume you are on PCs or won't want to limit themselves to that," said Dave Cole, Symantec's director of security response.

That's not to say Skrenta should get the blame anytime someone gets spam sent through a virus-enabled relay or finds a computer slow to boot because of a lingering pest. After all, there no evidence virus writers who followed even knew of Skrenta or his craft.

Fred Cohen, a security expert who wrote his Ph.D. dissertation in 1986 on computer viruses, said the conditions were right, and with more and more homes getting computers, "it was all a matter of time before this happened."

In fact, a number of viruses preceded "Elk Cloner," although they were experimental or limited in scope. Many consider Skrenta's the first true virus because it spread in the wild on the dominant home computers of its day.

"You had other people even at the time saying, 'We had this idea, we even coded it up, but we thought it was awful and we never released it,'" said Skrenta, who is now heading Blekko Inc., a month-old startup still working in stealth mode.

And where was his restraint?

Skrenta replied: "I was in the ninth grade."

Storm Worm Uses YouTube Ruse

Security pros are warning that distributors of the Storm Trojan are now using a YouTube video to lure users.

Contained in e-mails with subject lines such as "sheesh man what are you thinking," the malicious link claims to go to YouTube.com, but actually goes to a URL harboring exploit code.

"This is the first [YouTube] lure that the Storm folks are using but not the first that has used YouTube in the past," said Dan Hubbard, vice president of security research at San Diego-based Websense. "There are a

variety of e-mail subjects and bodies but basically they request you to view a video."

Dave Marcus, security research and communications manager at McAfee, based in Santa Clara, Calif., advised people to use caution when clicking on links in e-mails. Clicking on the attachment associated with this particular attack will infect the victim’s machine with the Nuwar worm, Marcus said.

"Malware writers continue to use social engineering tactics to infect a user’s machine with a copy of Nuwar, this time latching on to the popularity of YouTube to lure people into clicking on the URL," he said. "We expect these spammers to continue to use these types of tactics and it will be imperative that users get educated on how to avoid becoming a victim."

A study released Aug. 27 by Websense found that 12 percent of responding IT managers working for SMBs (small and midsize businesses) had no way to enforce their businesses’ Internet usage policies. The report surveyed 450 IT managers and employees within the United States.

The study also found that business-owned computers were left vulnerable to security threats for more than 21 days, on average, despite the daily updates promoted and offered by operating system and anti-virus vendors. Only 4 percent of SMB employees surveyed had daily security updates on their work PCs and 11 percent said the security software on their work PCs had never been updated.

The results are bad news for those concerned about the spread of the Storm Trojan and other malware. According to researchers at McAfee, users who fall for the latest Storm Trojan ruse are directed to a site containing an image that tags back to YouTube’s logo.

In the background, an embedded, obfuscated JavaScript routine launches several browser and application exploits to infect the user’s machine with a copy of W32/Nuwar. In addition, if a machine is fully patched, the malware author has a backup plan - wording on the Web page meant to entice users into manually downloading the virus.

Hubbard said the overall resources of the attackers, the planning and the resilience built into the infrastructure are why the Storm Trojan remains such an active attack.

"This is clearly planned out," he said.

Microsoft Eyes Early 2008 Release for Vista Update

Microsoft Corp. said on Wednesday it plans to release the first major update to its Windows Vista operating system early next year.

Many of Microsoft’s large corporate customers wait for the release of the first "service pack" - a software package of fixes, updates and improvements - before implementing a new Windows operating system.

Corporate customers often hold back on adopting new software to allow Microsoft time to work out the kinks experienced by regular consumers who often buy a new computer with the latest operating system already

preloaded.

In a post on the company’s Web site, Microsoft said it plans to begin testing Windows Vista SP1 among a smaller audience in a few weeks and aims to ship the product to computer manufacturers in the first quarter of 2008.

Microsoft said the first service pack is not as significant as in the past, because the company can now send out patches and fixes to the product through online updates.

Windows Vista SP1 should, according to Microsoft, improve the operating system’s security, reliability and performance, but it will not change the product’s look or add any major features.

Microsoft also said it delayed the target date for when it will release its upcoming Windows Server 2008 to hardware manufacturers. The company now expects to release the product to manufacturers in the first quarter of 2008 from an earlier target of the end of 2007.

Redmond, Washington-based Microsoft said the delay should not affect its plan to launch Windows Server 2008 at the end of February.

The company also announced plans to release the third service pack of Windows XP, Vista’s predecessor, in the next few weeks. It will be released to PC makers in the first half of 2008.

HP Launches $300 Million Print 2.0 Campaign

"What do you have to say?" That’s the tagline HP will use in a $300 million marketing campaign, announced Tuesday, for its recently launched, wide-ranging Print 2.0 strategy.

First outlined in May, HP’s Print 2.0 strategy has three stated goals: delivering an advanced printing platform for increasing speed and lowererd costs for high-volume printing, making printing from the Web easier, and expanding HP’s content creation and publishing platforms, such as Snapfish, to new markets.

To emphasize HP’s Print 2.0 efforts to provide output for all kinds of Internet-based media, the campaign will enable users to "mash up" or combine their content with free and exclusive content from singer/fashion designer Gwen Stefani, Burton Snowboards founder Jake Burton, and graphic designer Paula Scher.

At hp.com/gwen, users can customize Stefani’s designs - in greeting cards, CD labels, paper dolls, and other templates - with their own personalized information before printing them out. Using HP’s Tabblo technology, which HP acquired when it purchased the company of the same name in March, users can add their photos and text to pictures from Stefani’s Sweet Escape tour, print sample pages, and, for a fee, order the customized book.

Similarly, at hp.com/burton, tools are offered for brand building, and, at hp.com/paula, templates based on Scher’s designs allow users to create and print business cards, letterhead, and brochures.

Users can print the results of each subsite on home/office printers or,

the company said, eventually through a network of printing providers. There are also wikis, or group blogs, for consumers and small businesses to share information. In the fall, a Web site called HP Print Studio will have an ongoing repository of free templates for users to customize such materials as greeting cards, letterheads, business cards, and invitations.

But the campaign includes much more than just free, customizable sites. The company has introduced HP Scitex X2 printhead technology, a first-ever piezoelectric printhead for HP, to raise printing speeds and lower printing costs for high-volume users.

In addition, HP is partnering with several Web sites to make printing easier, such as using its Tabblo technology to help Flickr members make photo books and collages. HP-owned Snapfish will provide online printing for Windows Live Spaces, and the HP Yahoo Printing Toolbar offers one-click access to a printing utility download, free online classes, printing tips, and more.

HP’s Print 2.0 also covers DVD and labeling services. For example, the HP NextDayTV service will publish TV programs for retail customers on DVDs soon after their airdate, and will partner with Major League Baseball and other media partners. The HP Smart Labels & Packaging Solution offers secure serialization for pharmaceutical label and package printing to help combat drug counterfeiting.

And, this being HP, there are also new printers - including the first consumer, touchscreen compact photo printer and, for business, what the company called the world’s fastest mobile printer.

Country-Specific Domain Names Popular

The number of domain name registrations worldwide reached 138 million midway through 2007, a 31 percent increase from a year earlier, according to the company that operates much of the Internet’s core address directories.

Although the ".com" suffix continues to be the most popular, with about 55 million registrations, VeriSign Inc. said country-code domains such as ".fr" for France are strong. There were more than 51 million country-code registrations collectively, a 36 percent hike from mid-2006.

Germany’s ".de" is the leading country code and the second-most popular suffix overall, followed by ".net" in third place. The United Kingdom’s ".uk," China’s ".cn" and ".org" are among the other leading suffixes.

VeriSign runs the databases listing all ".com" and ".net" names as well as the master directory, or root server, that lists all the Internet’s suffixes, meaning all traffic touches the company’s computers at one point or another. Domain names are key for helping computers find Web sites and route e-mail messages.

There are currently 267 domain name suffixes in the main root server, with ".asia" being the latest addition. Most of them are country codes, ranging from ".ac" for the Ascension Island to ".zw" for Zimbabwe.

Savvy Teachers Use The Net To Engage Students

As children head back to school savvy teachers are looking for the best ways to help students maximize their learning potential.

Laptops are replacing traditional notebooks and educators are using technology to provide individualized instruction and online tutoring, which can add variety and help students to learn better.

"It’s an exciting time to be in education because we are no longer looking for one method," Kris Enright, executive director of the Professional Association of Colorado Educators, said in an interview.

"Now, with the opportunity to meet individual needs, schools are becoming more diverse."

Enright added that the ability to address student needs with a variety of tools is key to good instruction and effective learning.

Tutor.com, a company based in New York City, served 750,000 online students last year. This year it expects to help more than a million, George Cigale, founder of the site said in an interview.

Tutor.com has a network of 1,800 certified teachers, college professors, undergraduates and graduate students in the United States and Canada from accredited universities.

"The vision from the early days eight years ago was to make it possible for a student to connect ... whenever they are stuck, whenever they need help overcoming an educational challenge," Cigale said.

The use of online tutors who meet government-approved academic standards is supported by the U.S. Department of Education for supplemental educational services under its No Child Left Behind Act.

"The department believes that online tutoring is an important option for students eligible for supplemental educational services who live in rural areas or have other challenges accessing a traditional tutoring program," Morgan Brown, assistant deputy secretary in the Department of Education’s Office of Innovation and Improvement, said in an email.

President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 in an effort to improve educational standards throughout the United States.

Parents are always looking for additional ways to supplement their child’s learning, according to Enright.

"If the student is actually learning and it’s authentic, then it’s effective," he added.

Don’t Let Your Boss Catch You Reading This

If you are at work, chances are you are probably doing it right now.

Walk into any large office, and you will most likely hear the telltale computer bleeps of chat programs and online games, accompanied by furious

mouse-clicking. Employees may seem busy, but many are wasting time on the Internet, or "cyberslacking."

Studies worldwide suggest employees spend about a fifth of their work shifts engaging in personal activities. Their favourite time waster? The Internet.

Patricia Wallace, author of the 2004 book "The Internet in the Workplace: How New Technology Is Transforming Work," said employees have always found ways to avoid working too hard.

"The issue is now you have something that seems to be genuinely irresistible because it’s such a gateway to the whole planet that’s right there on your desk and easily concealed to people passing by," said Wallace, a professor at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

Employees who cyberslack have been shown to spend most of their time emailing, and almost a third of their messages were not related to work, said James Philips, a psychology professor at Australia’s Monash University.

Many workers manage finances or shop online. Popular social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace are also common cyberslacking destinations. It is not uncommon to see a user write on his "status" report that he or she is "at work."

Some companies, which spend millions on Web access, have fired workers for cyberslacking, citing concerns about inappropriate activities. But hiding it has become easier - people can access the Internet through mobile phones, for instance.

Films and television shows have been focusing on the phenomenon.

Time-wasting at work was spoofed in the 1999 cult film "Office Space," while "The Office," a British TV comedy that now has a U.S. version, has shown characters playing a computer war game as part of what they described as a team-building exercise.

Walter Block, a professor of economics at Loyola University in New Orleans, pointed to similarities between employees who slacked off before the computer age and those who waste time in cyberspace.

"I think they do it for the same reason they did it before - some people, because they’re cheating their boss, other people, because it helps them work," Block said.

Office-dedicated Web sites have been popping up.

Workers can go to www.overheardintheoffice.com to post and rate humorous quotes overheard at their workplaces. They can rant about office colleagues and bosses at www.annoyingcoworker.com - and email them anonymous messages through the Web site.

"UGH! You eat like a pig!" one person wrote. "Stop smacking your lips and licking your fingers and snorting while you eat chips two feet away from me! It’s like feeding time at the zoo!"

A recent survey by online compensation firm Salary.com showed about six out of 10 employees in the United States acknowledged wasting time at work.

About 34 percent listed personal Internet use as the leading time-wasting activity in the workplace. Employees said they did so because they were bored, worked too many hours, were underpaid or were unchallenged at work.

Firms all over the world are concerned about potentially harmful effects of surfing they deem to be inappropriate may have on their company's image. Many firms use computer software to monitor Web activity and block certain sites or servers.

Almost a fifth of those surveyed in a 2006 Israeli-American poll said they accessed online sex sites at work.

U.S.-based electronics firm IBM once fired an employee for visiting an adult chat room at work. Last year, a New York City employee was sacked by Mayor Michael Bloomberg for having a card game on his computer screen.

Some experts say private Internet use at work does not affect productivity and could even be beneficial.

"The so-called cyberslacking could be online shopping or arranging for your dog-sitter online or taking care of banking so you don't have to take a two-hour lunch," Wallace said. "In cases like that, you're actually helping employees save time."

"Junk Sleep" Damaging Teenagers' Health

British teenagers are damaging their health by not getting enough sleep because they are distracted by electronic gadgets in their bedrooms, according to a survey on Tuesday.

Advice body The Sleep Council said "junk sleep" could rival the consumption of unhealthy junk food as a major lifestyle issue for parents of teenage children.

Its poll of 1,000 youngsters aged 12 to 16 found that 30 percent managed just 4 to 7 hours sleep as opposed to the recommended 8 or 9 hours.

Almost a quarter said they fell asleep more than once a week while watching TV, listening to music or using other electronic gadgets.

"This is an incredibly worrying trend," said Dr Chris Idzikowski of the Edinburgh Sleep Centre.

"What we are seeing is the emergence of Junk Sleep - that is sleep that is of neither the length nor quality that it should be in order to feed the brain with the rest it needs to perform properly at school."

Nearly all the teenagers had a phone, music system or TV in their bedroom, with around two-thirds possessing all three.

Almost one in five of the teenage boys said the quality of their sleep had been affected by leaving their TV or computer on. The survey also found that 40 percent of youngsters felt tired each day, with girls aged 15 to 16 faring the worst.

However just 11 percent said they were bothered by the lack or quality

of sleep.

"I'm staggered that so few teenagers make the link between getting enough good quality sleep and how they feel during the day," Idzikowski said.

"Teenagers need to wake up to the fact that to feel well, perform well and look well, they need to do something about their sleep."

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